



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

Digital Platforms as dislocators

On digitalization and limits of discourse

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Abstract

In the ever evolving digital landscape, the platform has been of significant importance. The questions of what constitutes a digital platform as well as the effects that follow in the wake of the same have been discussed extensively. The focus has primarily been on companies and how their business are affected, how businesses can create and capture value, and how the digital platform enable the invention of new business models. But maybe not that much attention have been given to the possible transformative power of the digital platform from a broader perspective? Although the well-being of a society depends on the success of companies, the social body itself has been formed and built according to former relationships between companies and states. These structures can now be challenged and it is against this background I have written this thesis. Through the conduct of two discourse analyzes, I sought to answer the question: How does the emergence of digital platforms affect incumbent firms and institutions? The short answer is that they are affected, but to varying degrees both in relation to time as well as magnitude. Consequently, the comprehension of *digital platform* is context-dependent.

Keywords: digitalization, digital platform, discourse theory, discourse analysis

Abstrakt

I det ständigt växande digitala landskapet har plattformen blivit mycket viktig. Frågorna om vad som utgör en digital plattform och effekterna som följer i dess spår diskuteras flitigt. Fokus har främst varit på företag och hur verksamheter påverkas, hur företag kan skapa och fånga värde och hur den digitala plattformen möjliggör skapandet av nya affärsmodeller. Lika mycket uppmärksamhet har kanske inte givits den digitala plattformens möjliga transformativa kraft sett ur ett bredare perspektiv? För även om ett samhälles välbefinnande beror på företagets framgång har själva den sociala kroppen byggts upp enligt tidigare relationer mellan företag och stater. Dessa strukturer kan nu komma att utmanas och det är mot denna bakgrund jag har skrivit denna uppsats. Genom att utföra två diskursanalyser försökte jag svara på frågan: Hur påverkas etablerade företag och institutioner av digitala plattformars framväxt? Det korta svaret är att de påverkas, men i varierande grad både i relation till tid och storlek. Därav följer att förståelsen av *digital plattform* är kontextberoende.

Nyckelord: digitalisering, digital plattform, diskursteori, diskursanalys

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1 Introduction

“whereas now that humankind stands on the threshold of an era when ever more sophisticated robots, bots, androids and other manifestations of artificial intelligence (“AI”) seem to be poised to unleash a new industrial revolution, which is likely to leave no stratum of society untouched, it is vitally important for the legislature to consider its legal and ethical implications and effects, without stifling innovation” (Delvaux 2017, p. 3)

In April of 1999, the *Committee for the coordination of legislation for radio, television and telecommunications* (Konvergensutredningen 1999) submitted its final report to the Swedish government. The committee had been assigned the task to investigate the consequences of a possible coordination of the laws related to radio, television and other radio communications "on the basis that legislation should facilitate the development of electronic information services and address the needs of citizens, business and society with regard to such services" (Konvergensutredningen 1999, p. 283). The motive of the directive is to be found in the technological development. Different types of content (text, still images, audio and moving images) could suddenly be handled simultaneously. Digitization enabled for various types of signals to be converted into binary digits, and services previously delivered via specific distribution technologies were suddenly able to reach consumers in different ways. The phenomenon came to be known as *convergence* and points to the fusion of infrastructures and services (Konvergensutredningen 1999). In their final report, the committee concluded, among other things, that the technical progress towards continued convergence was in an intensive phase and furthermore:

"So far, electronic commerce [over the internet] is not very extensive and it's hard to make profits. But if the more optimistic forecasts come true, electronic commerce will be significant. The profits will then probably be made by some parts of the trade, such as wholesalers and manufacturers, while intermediate distributors may become the biggest losers." (Konvergensutredningen 1999, p. 314-315; author translation)

In this thesis I study digital platforms. I intend to analyze how incumbent firms and institutions react and adapts to the emergence of digital platforms. How they try to relate to this new actor and moreover, how this relation may lead to confusion and perplexity on the one hand, but to a sense of opportunities and progress on the other. The delicate balance act of how to embrace and utilize the

innovative power of the platform, but at the same time realize that regulations may be needed for the society to adapt (Dølvik & Jesnes 2017): “The challenge is to promote the innovative aspects of the platform economy, but at the same time work against a return to an inferior social order.” (Söderqvist 2016b, p. 6, author translation).

This thesis build on Nabers (2015) thoughts on crisis as a permanent attribute of the social – that (political) decisions is taken in the context of structural failure – and my aim is to study digital platforms, not primarily from an economic or strategic perspective, but from a socio-technical one. Specifically I turn to Tilson, Sørensen & Lyytinen (2013) notion of how platforms affects social structures by creating new habits, behaviors and ways of organizing. I accomplish this by implementing two discourse theoretical case studies of two specific discourses (the Public Service discourse and the trade union part-model discourse). Finally, I conduct a comparative study in which I compare and discuss differences and similarities drawn from the cases. Thus, the research question that sets out to guide this thesis is as follows: *How does the emergence of digital platforms affect incumbent firms and institutions?*

I end this introduction with a few guiding words about the disposition: In Chapter 2, the reader is presented to the streams of thought on which this thesis rests. Chapter 3 is devoted to the introduction of the theoretical framework. In chapter 4 I review and present how the work was carried out. In Chapter 5 I conduct two discourse analysis, and the results of those are then discussed in Chapter 6. I sum up the thesis with a short conclusion in Chapter 7.

2 Background

This thesis is about digital platforms and how they may affect incumbents and institutions. To put the work in context and present the reader to the bearing thoughts on which this thesis relies, a brief literature review is presented below. Furthermore, a discussion follows on how I reasoned regarding choice of theory and method based on subject of interest and how I wanted to investigate the matter.

2.1 Digitalization

One of the fundamental properties of Information Technology is the binary nature of computing (Kallinikos 2009). The process of digitization converts previous analog artefacts to streams of binary digits and thereby move them from a rigid and concrete reality to an abstract realm of plasticity:

"The interoperability of different information systems or artefacts that are so characteristic of contemporary technologies of computing would have been impossible without the binary constitution of computing" (Kallinikos 2009, p. 193).

As a direct consequence of this characteristic follows that the analog nature of reality can be reduced to binary variations, and that this transcendence enables people to reproduce and form their own (digital) reality with respect to cognitive and cultural differences (Kallinikos 2009).

In order to be able to grasp the complex and radical nature of digital innovations, Yoo et al. (2010) points to the importance of contemplating over how digital innovations differ from earlier technologies. That the fundamental properties of digital technology are *reprogrammability* (Yoo et al. 2010; Yoo et al. 2012; Kallinikos et al. 2013) and *data homogenization* (Yoo et al. 2010; Yoo et al. 2012). And as digital technology becomes widely spread, these properties paves the way for two unparalleled characteristics of innovation: *convergences* and *generativity*. The generative potential stems from the fact that digital technologies remains intentionally *unfinished* (Zittrain 2006 ; Yoo et al. 2010; Yoo et al. 2012 ; Kallinikos 2012; Kallinikos et al. 2013) which means that digital technologies are malleable to their nature, and that they invites to be experimenting with. That they can be compiled and bundled into a variety of different combinations (Yoo et al. 2010; Yoo et al. 2012). But this state of incompleteness is not only a good thing. When opening up for generativity one also opens up for vulnerability and the realization that the dynamic nature of digital artifacts makes them difficult to control (Zittrain 2006): "They are objects yet they lack the plenitude and stability afforded by traditional items and devices" (Kallinikos et al. 2013, p. 357-358). In the light of this, Kallinikos (2012) observes that the technological evolution has gone from systems of

permanent processes to, what he calls, a *generative matrix* (p. 73) from which new functions and services are constantly delivered.

2.2 Platforms and Ecosystems

The main task for a digital platform is to mediate activities between buyers and sellers and/or provide content (techniques, technologies, and interfaces) to third-parties in order to help them build their products (Baldwin & Woodard 2009; Rong et al. 2013; Kenney & Zysman 2016). In a sense, the notion of platform plainly points to a constellation of digital arrangements (data and algorithms) that serves to arrange and organize social and economic activity (Kenney & Zysman 2016). Therefore, the platform plays a crucial role in the digital transformation where incumbent firms searches replace their legacy systems and go for more flexible and innovative ones (Tilson, Sørensen & Lyytinen 2013). But then, what is a platform? How does the architecture look like? Baldwin and Woodard (2009) points to the modularization of complex systems where certain components remains stable whilst other are encouraged to change. This module reuse leads to both economies of scale and scope. Tiwana, Konsynski and Bush (2010) elaborates on this and believes that a platform's architecture should be perceived as conceptual blueprint where a ecosystem is partitioned into a fairly stable core (the platform) – low variety, high reusability – and a additional set of modules - high variety, low usability.

According to Rong et al. (2013), the platform includes three important functions: interaction interface, value creation, and network formulation. Where the interaction interfaces are the mediators between the platform and its complements (see Baldwin & Woodard 2009); value creation points to the fact that the platform enables ecosystem partners to create as well as co-create value, and that focus thereby, in a way, shifts from competition to collaboration within ecosystem; and since partners within ecosystems start working together, they will create specific network patterns to compete against rivaling ecosystem's (Rong et al. 2013).

The concept of cloud computing and the unprecedented possibility of computing power it brings forms an infrastructure that act as breeding ground for digital platforms. In fact, the generative mechanism of Information Technology gives the digital platform a unique characteristic to act both as platform on its own as well as the infrastructure to other platforms (Kenney & Zysman 2016; Tilson, Sørensen & Lyytinen 2013).

Gawer (2014) means that platforms is traditionally viewed either from an economic perspective – platform as a double-sided market – or from an engineering perspective – platform as a technological architecture. But, by recognizing platforms as evolving organization, where both value generating aspects as well as technological aspects are key, a bridge between the two

perspectives can be accomplished. (Gawer 2014).

Tilson, Sørensen and Lyytinen (2013) is of the opinion that abstract models of platforms used in current research removes the intrinsic complexity, and by that also the possibility to understand the phenomenon correctly. They also perceive that most of the literature concerns new product development, strategy, and economics whilst the authors want to bring forward and study platforms as socio-technical reconfigurations, where platforms can have profound effects on social structures since they create new roles, habits and patterns of action (Tilson, Sørensen and Lyytinen 2013).

Due to the platform's ability to create an infrastructure that encourages collaboration, communication and shared value creation, they often operate at the heart of ecosystems, acting as keystones with the ecosystem's health and well-being as primary focus (Parker, van Alstyne & Choudray 2016; Iansiti & Levien 2004). Moore (1993) define a business ecosystems as: companies that “work cooperatively and competitively to support new products, satisfy customer needs, and eventually incorporate the next round of innovations” (Moore 1993, p. 76). These ecosystems “consists of mutually dependent communities of businesses and consumers that have symbiotic relationship with the platform (Evans, Hagius & Schmalensee 2006, p. vii). An important aspect of the strategic thinking around ecosystems is that a platform (company) can operate in multiple ecosystems simultaneously. In one ecosystem, the platform can play a significant role as a focal actor (keystone) while taking on a more peripheral one (niche player) in another system (Iansiti & Levien 2004).

2.3 Scientific perspective and motivation of choice

My work started with a initial thought: I wanted to study how institutions and incumbent firms has reacted to digitalization in general and platforms in particular, and primarily from a socio-technical point of view. To investigate what effects digital platforms may have on social structures.

I found that the interview as a method of data collection was not suitable for the type of study I wanted to conduct. Instead, I intended use texts of various kinds as empirical basis. One of the issues I dealt with in relation to choosing texts as data source was the history aspect – that past events and decisions permeate texts. Consequently, I had to take into account that texts are constructed by people who resides in certain contexts of *meanings*, influenced as they are by established practices and *truths*. I realized that the analytical method of choice must have a critical approach to taken-for-granted knowledge, as well as acknowledge that various *ways of peoples expressing themselves* plays an active role in how meanings are perceived and changed. These thoughts and reflections led me to the concept of discourse.

There are several approaches to discourse theory and they vary both in their understanding of discourse, but also in their understanding of the interplay between language and power struggles. The understanding of discourse and how it can be analyzed can vary between just analyzing text, without further connection with the context in which it is included, to engage in more abstractly attempting to expose and analyze the systems of meaning that discourses constitutes (Bergström & Boreus 2005; Torfing 2005; Jørgensen & Philips 2002). Torfing (2005) believes that there are three different generations of traditions within discourse theory where the first focuses solely on the individual persons actual use of language [content analysis; conversation analysis]. The second generation expands the discourse concept to include social practices, but that there exists fields that are not covered by discourse; that social structures consist of discursive and non-discursive elements and it is therefore in an analysts of this traditions interest to investigate the relationship between social structures and discourse [Norman Fairclough - Critical Discourse Analysis; Michael Foucault]. The third generation expands the discourse concept even further to cover all social phenomena. Here, discourse is perceived as a relational system of meaning that is produced through historical and political interventions; in this tradition an analyst seek to uncover a specific system of meaning (discourse), and also how historical conditions might have contributed to the development of discourse [Jacques Derrida; Chantal Mouffe & Ernesto Laclau] (Bergström & Boreus 2005; Torfing 2005; Jørgensen & Philips 2002).

In view of my wishes as to how a theory/method should look like in order to suit the further work, I came to turn to the third generation's view on discourse and chose Laclau and Mouffe (2001) aspect of discourse theory. Henceforth, when I refer to *Discourse Theory* I am actually referring to the perspective of discourse theory put forward by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in their work *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, and how the perspective has been discussed further by other authors (Nabers 2015; Howarth 2007 ; Torfing 2005; Howarth 2005; Åkerström Andersen 2003; Jørgensen & Philips 2002; Howarth & Stavrakakis 2000; Norval 2000).

3 Discourse Theory and a Framework of Crisis and Change

“According to Laclau and Mouffe, all our knowledge, and the discursive modalities that it takes, is completely predicted on particular circumstances; no human practices exists outside the specific conditions that both make them possible and delimit them. All human phenomena are de facto possible, but none is necessary; they are all contingent.” (Dahlgren 2013, p. 207)

3.1 Discourse according to Discourse Theory

One of the underlying assumptions of Discourse Theory is that discourses are social and political constructions that establishes systems of relationships between objects and practices, and by that providing positions with which social agents can recognize. That identity is molded through its relation to other objects (Torfing 2005; Howarth & Stavrakakis 2000). Therefore, a political project aims to weave together different strands of discourse to be able to control or arrange a field of meaning. Accordingly, Discourse Theory analyses how social practices articulate the different discourses that constitute social reality. Discourse Theory employs two categories that constitutes the foundation on which the theory rests: discursivity and discourse (Howarth & Stavrakakis 2000).

Discursivity is to be seen as the theoretical horizon inside which the being of objects is constituted. Meaning that – according to Discourse Theory – *every* object are constituted as objects of discourse, there is nothing societal that is determined outside of the field of discursivity. However, this does not mean that Discourse Theory denies the existence of a physical world. Rather, it points to that an object's social construction – or the perceived meaning of it – depends on the discursive field in which it is perceived and articulated (Nabers 2015; Laclau & Mouffe 2001; Howarth & Stavrakakis 2000):

"The fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has *nothing to do* with whether the world is external to thought, or with the realism/idealism opposition. An earthquake or the falling of a brick is an event that certainly exists, in the sense that it occurs here and now, independently of my will. But whether their specificity as objects is constructed in terms of 'natural phenomena' or 'expression of the wrath of God', depends upon the structuring of a discursive field."

(Laclau & Mouffe 2001, p. 108, italics in original)

Furthermore, the societal is to be seen as permeated by undecidables and not controlled by structural determination. An assumption that leads to the idea of the social as inherently unstable, and that the social is never perfectly seamed together. This incompleteness of social structures is in

itself a breeding ground for political actions (Nabers 2015).

Discourses are perceived as systems of social relations and practices that arises within the field of discursivity (Howarth & Stavrakakis 2000; Åkerström Andersen 2003). Furthermore, Discourse Theory acknowledge that *all* social practices takes place against a background of discourse. Whatever we think, say or do is colored by discourse, and discourse is in turn constantly modified by *what* we are thinking, saying and doing (Torfing 2005). Meaning is acquired and built through discourse.

Discourses consists of both linguistic as well as non-linguistic elements, hence Discourse Theory rejects any distinction between a linguistic and a behavioral element. Discourses can therefore be seen as defining societal structures. An important property of a discourse in the Discourse Theory tradition, is that it is in itself *political*; that it involves the construction of antagonism and the ongoing struggle between *outsiders* and *insiders*. From this perspective, discourse cannot really be understood without reference to transformation, uncertainty and change. Discourses are both contingent, as well as historical, to their nature which means that they are always exposed to political forces and dislocations of their structure caused by events beyond their control (Nabers 2015; Howarth & Stavrakakis 2000).

"[A]gents and systems are social constructs that undergo constant historical and social change as a result of political practices. Indeed, a major task of the discourse theorist is to chart and explain such historical and social change by recourse to political factors and logics." (Howarth & Stavrakakis 2000, p. 6)

3.2 The essential concepts and logics of Discourse Theory

In what follows, a short presentation of the conceptual vocabulary of Discourse Theory is outlined. Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) given goods are quite complex and of high intellectual density, therefore only the concepts used in the forthcoming analysis are briefly presented below¹.

Articulation, Nodal Points, Empty and Floating Signifiers

As discussed above, discourse is constituted in relation to what it excludes, and in Discourse Theory two categories defines what is included and excluded in a certain discourse: moments and elements. *Moments* are signs that exists within discourse. *Elements* are those signs that exist in the discursivity but are not yet fixed within discourse. The concept of *articulation* is the practice that establishes relations between elements, building meaning, and thereby transforms elements to moments within discourse (Laclau & Mouffe 2001; Jørgensen & Philips 2002).

¹ An overview of the concepts and logics of Discourse Theory can be found in Appendix A

A discourse is shaped around certain, privileged signs (moments), from which other signs obtain their meaning. These partial fixations of meaning are called *nodal points*. For instance, in a political discourse 'democracy' is a nodal point whereas in a medical discourse 'the body' is considered a nodal point (Jørgensen & Philips 2002).

One of the cornerstones of Discourse Theory is that the social field can never achieve fully closure, that change is constantly in the making. Nevertheless, the *idea* of fully closure and fullness exists as an (impossible) ideal. For this ideal to emerge the notion of an *empty signifier* acting as a nodal point needs to be in place. These signifiers have no fixed content and can therefore act as symbols of a missing fullness (Nabers 2015; Jørgensen & Philips 2002; Howarth & Stavrakakis 2000).

"[T]he articulation of political discourse can only take place around an empty signifier that function as a nodal point. In other words, emptiness is now revealed as an essential quality of the nodal point, as an important condition of possibility for its hegemonic success." (Howarth & Stavrakakis 2000, p. 9)

Certain elements are more prone to assume different meanings than others; these elements can mean different things to different groups depending on the nature or topic of discourse. These elements are called *floating signifiers* since they are open for different discourses to invest meaning in. Both empty and floating signifiers have in common that they are not clearly fixed within discourse. But while the empty signifier takes a stable front for granted (a softer form of antagonism, see below), the floating signifier opens up for a front to be displaced (hegemony, see below) (Nabers 2015; Bergström & Boreus 2005 ; Jørgensen & Philips 2002) .

Logics of Equivalence and Difference, Antagonism and Hegemony

Discourses, and the identities that are created within them, are intrinsically political unities with a dormant property of *antagonism*. The notion of social antagonism is central for Discourse Theory, and in short it can be described as the "evidence of the frontiers of a social formation" (Howarth & Stavrakakis 2000, p. 9). When antagonism occurs the identity is no longer fixed, but disputed by forces from *outside*. To be more specific, social antagonism occur because social agents is *unable* to achieve their full identity, because other social agents hinders them. As a consequence, Discourse Theory aims to explore and analyze the mechanism of social antagonism – how this obstruction of identity is constructed by social agents (Howarth & Stavrakakis 2000).

But then, how does this social antagonism really build up? What about this presence of the 'other'? Here, Discourse Theory introduces *logics of equivalence and difference*. The logic of equivalence explains how groups of differences share a common whole. Separate identities are

grouped together to form a chain of equivalence and build a front towards a common *other*. The chain is anchored to an empty/floating signifier who takes the mission to represent the whole. A (political) project that employs the logic of equivalence aims at setting up a frontier against an antagonists. On the other hand, the logic of difference is about breaking up existing chains of equivalence and by that weaken an antagonistic polarity (Nabers 2015; Howarth & Stavrakakis 2000; Howarth 2007).

Hegemony, in the Discursive Theory tradition, refers to the struggle between discourses that collide antagonistically. This struggle can lead to one discourse being overpowered by another, and this happens through rearticulation of elements, hence hegemony. "The hegemonic intervention has succeeded if one discourse comes to dominate alone, where before there was conflict, and the antagonism is dissolved." (Jørgensen & Philips 2002, p. 48)

Sedimented Discourses, Myths, and Dislocation

When social practices – articulated in certain discourses – appears so natural that there seem to be no alternative to how things work, they are considered *sedimented*. These discourses are so firmly rooted that the contingency is forgotten. This is the effect of historical struggles and political processes. Over time things becomes *taken for granted* and the discourse becomes *sedimented*. These sedimented discourses, in turn, materializes as institutionalized structures (Nabers 2015; Jørgensen & Philips 2002).

A fundamental idea of Discourse Theory is that discourses are falsely perceived as fixed and closed systems of meaning. By *myths* about society and identity the discursive construct is perceived as a natural and distinct part of reality. The myth is to be seen as a somewhat distorted representation of the reality. A representation that needs to be there in order for us to be able to act. Nevertheless, the myth gives the false perception of closure, and it is therefore one of the Discourse Theories main goal to: "[...] strive to show that the entities which we see as objective and natural are, in reality, contingent combinations of elements which could always have been articulated differently." (Jørgensen & Philips 2002, p. 186)

When a discourse is confronted by events it can not comprehend or integrate into the current system of meaning, the discourse becomes *dislocated*. These events are characterized by uncertainty over what they signify and the discursive structure becomes disrupted. The notion of dislocation is therefore to be seen as a structural failure where the discourse is unable to make sense of one or more signs. In this process, antagonism can be both a source as well as a possible reaction of dislocation. A dislocation carry with itself a transformational force which leads to that earlier logics and assumptions are questioned and actors have to open up to alternative models of thought and the

possibility of creation of new discourses, where hegemonic practices can prove useful (Nabers 2015; Torfing 2005; Howarth & Stavrakakis 2000.)

3.3 A model of Crisis and Change

In his book *A Poststructuralist Discourse Theory of Global Politics* Dirk Nabers develops an approach that *crisis* loses its ordinary meaning as a reoccurring event, and instead should be perceived as a ubiquitous feature of the social. He digs into and try to explain how and why society transforms and which role the crisis-prone character of the same plays in the context (Nabers 2015). His work is greatly influenced by Ernesto Laclau's and Chantal Mouffe's (2001) and in this thesis I adopt his thoughts on a *theoretical model of crisis and change* as an analytical tool. One of the model's major advantages is that it can serves as a framework for how Laclau's and Mouffe's (2001) thoughts can be applied on empirical material.

Nabers (2015) model (Figure 1) rests on three assumptions regarding the nature of discourse: (1) it is intrinsically insufficient, which leads to the essential (but futile) desire of closure; (2) it is constantly intimidated by alternative systems of meaning (discourses); (3) the struggle for closure is political and seeks to fill the void which occurred as a result of dislocated structures (Nabers 2015). The model consists of four categories and each category will act as an analytical step in the forthcoming empirical study. The categories are – *Sedimented discourses*, *Dislocation*, *Antagonism*, and *Institutionalization* – and the model symbolizes the never-ending circle of the political:

"The ontology of the social depicted in [the model], which emphasizes the incompleteness and dislocation of the social, the antagonistic character of the subject and the differential quality of any identity, makes social change possible." (Nabers 2015, p. 123)

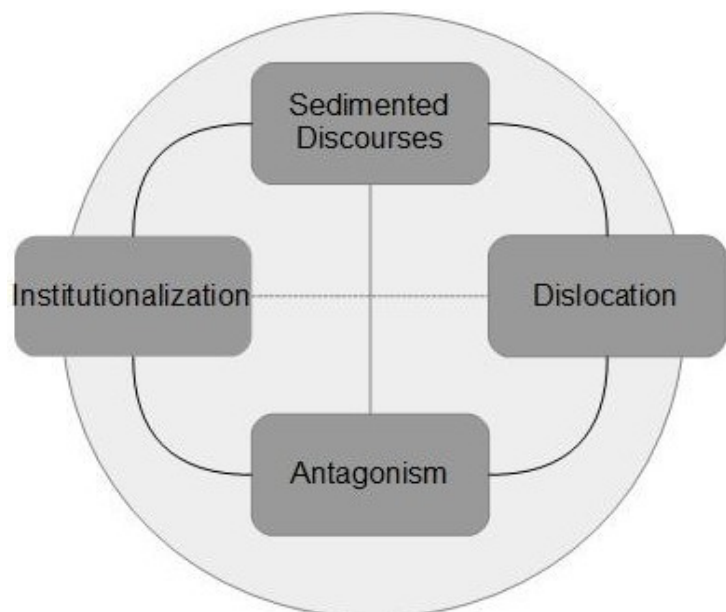


Figure 1: Theoretical model of crisis and change (Nabers 2015, p. 124)

4 Research Design

Although Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) work vastly contributes to the theoretical understanding of how meaning systems (discourses) are created and changed, they have not much to say how to practically apply these methods and tools on to empirical material. Here, others has built upon and expanded the framework to also discuss and consider methodological assumptions (Jørgensen & Philips 2002; Åkerström Andersen 2003; Howarth 2005; Howarth 2007; Nabers 2015).

According to Howarth (2005), Discourse Theory should be perceived as a research programme that consists of a system of ontological assumptions and theoretical concepts². To approach a discussion regarding methodology and Discourse Theory one have to do it from the perspective that Discourse Theory gives priority to epistemology over ontology, to the *how* instead of the *what* or *why* (Åkerström Andersen 2003). I.e. Discourse Theory builds on the idea that social meanings are relational, contextual and contingent and that Discourse Theory is problem-driven, rather than method- or theory-driven research (Howarth 2005; Howarth 2007). Furthermore, it is central to the Discourse Theory that the analysis of discourse is just *that* – to analyse the discourse as it is expressed within the texts at hand – and *not* the work of uncover a specific actors possible hidden motives or secret plans (Wæver 2005).

In what follows I will spend some time discussing suitable research strategy, production of empirical data and the analysing of texts.

4.1 Research strategy

In Discourse Theory two research strategies is considered central – case studies and comparative research – and in my thesis I employ them both. The case study is in a way optimal, since it is in the nature of Discourse Theory to investigate, interpret and clarify individual problematized objects of study (Howarth 2005; Howarth 2007). In fact, according to Howarth (2005):

"[...] it is important to make the sceptical point that for discourse theorists an overhasty and unreflective tendency to generalize *is* an inaccurate way of depicting, explaining, and intervening in social reality." (Howarth 2005, p. 331, italics in original)

A case study in the Discourse Theory tradition can take a variety of forms. How one analyse a particular case depends on the research question one intend to answer. One can choose to study how a discourse is constructed by identifying nodal points, empty and floating signifiers and their relationship to one another. Or one can study how different discourses conflict with one another and

² These concepts are described in section 3

struggles for dominance by focusing on the concepts of antagonism and hegemony and the logics of equivalence and difference. In this thesis I will employ Nabers (2015) model of crisis and change which focus on how certain elements dislocate discourses and by that opens up for antagonism and hegemonic interventions.

A way to build further understanding is to employ the comparative method and compare various case studies to see similarities and differences, and also be able to discuss a bit wider if it turns out that a further explanation would be needed for gain understanding of a particular phenomenon. In the Discourse Theory tradition, the comparative method rests on two pillars: (1) that it is ought to be problem-driven and (2) that it is grounded on the interpretation of particular cases (Howarth 2005). Furthermore, it is central to the Discourse Theory that the analysis of discourse is just *that* – the analysis of discourse as it is expressed within the texts at hand – and *not* the work of uncovering a specific actors possible hidden motives or plans (Wæver 2005).

4.2 Case Selection

As previously mentioned, my interests and aim with this thesis was to analyze and investigate how digital platforms affect incumbents and institutions. My primary goal was to search for two cases that were obviously affected, but not necessarily in the same way or to the same extent. Instead, it would almost be preferable if differences existed because I would then be able to compare differences and similarities.

I found my study objects in the following:

- (1) For quite some time, there has been an ongoing discussion in Sweden between the Public Service companies and the private media about what the Public Service responsibility actually is and should be. I found this case interesting since judging of the parties arguments, part of the problem was due to emergence of large, global digital platforms. But I also imagined that a contributing factor to the problematic situation could be found in the fact that the actors themselves have developed into digital platforms. Within this work, this discourse is called the *Public Service discourse*. Although I analyze the discourse in its entirety, I have chosen to highlight two of the major players, one on each side (Public Service – Sveriges television (SVT); private media – Aftonbladet). This because the two actors were constantly appearing in the material I collected, and therefore I felt that the analysis was conducted a bit more from their perspective.
- (2) Trade unions have become increasingly interested in digital platforms and their ability to organize work. In the report *Plattformsekonomin och svenska partsmodellen* (Plattform economy and the Swedish part-model), Fredrik Söderqvist (2016b) – representing the Swedish trade union Unionen – delves in to the potential problems and challenges that arises due to digital platforms

acting as intermediates and by that facilitate the sharing economy (or the *platform economy*, according to the author). Given that the Swedish part-model is an institution with relatively old and incorporated traditions, I became curious about how the emergence of digital platforms could possibly affect the situation. Bearing in mind that the above mentioned report became a key source of the analysis Unionen has had a prominent role within the same. Within this work, the discourse is called the *part-model discourse*.

I found that these two cases represented a good combination in the fact that Public Service discourse appeared to be in an ongoing problematic situation, while the trade-model discourse was in an earlier phase in consider how to tackle a potentially emergent issue. Also, that the two discourses seemed to be affected by digital platforms in different ways.

4.3 Data collection

In this thesis I analysed what Howarth (2005) calls linguistic and non-reactive data – that is, documents, reports and newspaper articles³. Then, how much material is needed in order to feel that one can rely on the result? Howarth (2005) suggests that the answer to that question lies in the initial formulation of the problem; that it is the specification of the problem at hand that strongly determines the contexts and limits of a research project and what type of texts that is possible to obtain. Where a nearly defined problem gives the possibility of a comprehensive archive, a more extended one usually exclude such a possibility (Howarth 2005):

"[T]he researcher is compelled to make decisions about the appropriate level and degree of contextualization and must establish the limits of any particular project. The key principles underpinning these decisions are that they must be explicit, consistent, and justified." (Howarth 2005, p. 337).

In the case of the Public Service discourse, the primary sources consisted of newspaper articles but also a set of reports as well as public documents were part of the archive. Because I studied the antagonism between two groups and their attempts to convince a third (government), I endeavored to try to weigh articles and reports in the sense that they represented both parties in equal amount of length and relevance.

Regarding the trade union discourse, the strategy became a bit different. Here it was more about a group (Unionen) that struggled and tried to find its place in a new reality (that of the platform economy). This fact led me to the insight that a close reading of the Union report *Plattformsekonomi och den svenska partsmodellen* (Söderqvist 2016b) would be the primary source for this study.

³ In Appendix B a complete bibliography of the texts is presented.

4.4 Textual Analysis

Since discourse is perceived as a system of meaning – where some elements and their relation to one another is central to the understanding for the system at hand – much of the textual work is about tracking key concepts and figure out their historical origins, their eventual transformations, and their relationship to other concepts (Wæver 2005). Therefore, one of the primary focus and central aim of textual analysis within the Discourse Theory tradition is to uncover and analyze the mechanisms of how meaning is represented, fixed, and disputed within a specific discourse. Further, to investigate how discourses constitutes knowledge and reality; and also, where discourses function side by side and where antagonism is out in the open. This is done by identifying and map the different concepts and logics of Discourse Theory within the examined texts at hand⁴ (Howarth 2007; Howarth 2005; Åkerström Andersen 2003; Jørgensen & Philips 2002).

During the textual analysis I used the categories in Nabers (2015) model – *sedimented discourse, dislocation, antagonism, institutionalization*) – as themes. Then, during reading, I was able to place vital text sections into each category to facilitate the analysis.

4 See section 3 for a further explanation of the concepts and logics of Discourse Theory.

5 Discourse Analysis

In this section I conduct two discourse analysis. The discourses are analyzed separately, and the analysis will follow the steps of Nabers (2015) framework of crisis and change. That is, I will start by uncover the *sedimented discourses* by locate, for the analysis, vital nodal points and moments related to them. Then, move on to find and investigate which element/s that contributes to *dislocate* respective discourse, and the emergence of empty and floating signifiers that can act as placeholders for new meanings. I finish the analysis by address the problems and challenges (*antagonism*) currently at hand, primarily by track down chains of equivalence that are build up around empty signifiers. I have chosen to place the last category of Nabers (2015) model (*institutionalization*) in the discussion part, and an explanation to why follows when we get there.

5.1 The part-model discourse

“In the decades to come, it seems likely that the platform model will be applied – or at least tested – in virtually every market for labor and professional services. How will this trend impact the service industries – not to mention the working life's of hundreds of millions of people?” (Parker, van Alstyne & Choudray 2016, p. 279)

Sedimented Discourse

The analysis of the material leads me to conclude that the origin of the part-model discourse can be explained as a hegemonic intervention that served to dissolve an antagonistic state during a very uncertain and troublesome time in the Swedish history. One of the major problem within the labor market, during the late 1800s and the early 1900s, was the turmoil that followed in the wake of the industrialization. The two parts of the labor market – LO (Landsorganisationen, founded in 1898) and SAF (Svenska Arbetsgivareföreningen, founded in 1902) – were in constant struggles and it all culminated in the mass strike of 1909 (where around 300.000 workers participated) which became a huge setback for the union movement who, in the aftermath, lost large numbers of members and the balance of forces between the two parties continued to be uneven in the employer's advantage (Johansson 1989; Johansson 2009; Ohlsson 2014).

When two discourses collides antagonisms arises. Certain moments (meanings) within the discourses loses their fixations and the antagonism becomes a struggle where one discourse tries to overpower the other by rearticulating its unfixed elements (Jørgensen & Philips 2002).

The introduction of new technology led to that the work could be organized in new ways –

taylorism – and the concept of '*rationalization*' showed to become an empty signifier (in a sense that it came to represent a new paradigm) as well as a floating signifier (since it came to mean different things to the different groups) that both parts tried to understand and fix. They did it by forming chains of equivalence that aimed to anchor the concept of '*rationalization*' within the discourse. The employer side built their meaning around '*rationalization*' by articulating the technology as '*objective and class neutral*' and that '*working efficiency*' should increase but not at the expense of the employee's. Furthermore, when it came to the economical aspects, the employers articulated that the Taylor program should '*benefit both parties*' – that rationalization should lead to higher profits as well as higher salaries. The workers, on the other hand, saw '*rationalization*' mainly as a threat which could lead to '*elimination*' and that the already high '*unemployment*' would increase even more. Also, the workers saw that they would have to work more but without corresponding raise of salary (Johansson 1989).

The hegemonic intervention is then the dissolution of antagonisms. A hegemonic intervention seek to achieve fixations of meaning across discourses that collides antagonistically (Jørgensen & Philips 2002). An important point to make here is that hegemony should not be perceived as a search for *domination*, but rather as a contestation and interrogation between competing social logics (discourses). In that sense, hegemony can be thought of as a project that links different identities and political forces together with the aim to create a new social order (Howarth 2007; Nabers 2015).

During the 1920's the working party increasingly came to acknowledge the benefits that could be linked to the technological development and the rationalization that followed. This turn meant that the state, as well as the two parts, came to approach each other in the view of the advantages of the industrialization. All parties came to see '*peace*', '*rationalization*' and '*growth*' as three factors which would favored them all. Although positive regarding the macroeconomic effects regarding rationalization, the union (LO) were still critical of the effects that it brought to individual workers out in the companies. The cooperation between the parts was most uncertain, and came to a halt due to the mass unemployment that appeared in the 30s. During the years 1930-1933 it was as high as 20,8 percent. The employer part indicated that the precarious situation was a result of organized workers that pushed up wages which in turn caused that a massive wave of rationalization swept the industry with mass unemployment as a natural outcome. The union, on their hand, pointed against '*rationalization*' as the core factor of the mass unemployment and the social misery that prevailed at the time.

During the years to come, a massive number of strikes and lockouts succeeded each other. Finally the three parts - state, workers and employers - realized that the situation was unbearable

and that it was a necessity to restore peace on the labor market. This could be achieved in one of either two ways: (1) through legislation, (2) that the two parts - SAF and LO - could find a way to restore the cooperation between the parts. For the latter to be a realistic option, the state would have to take responsibility of the effects of rationalization and amongst them, the unemployment; the union's opinion was that the individual worker should not bear the responsibility of the shortcomings of society, it was a state matter. The parts went for the second choice, and with the state as responsible for the unemployment policy the opening for a part-model was now a possibility. 1938, after two years of negotiations, LO and SAF signed an agreement which stipulated and controlled how the parts would handle disputes and controversies before strikes and lockouts were used (Johansson 1989).

"[The Swedish part-model] is a labor regime based on the notion that labor market parties, in an equal relationship, agrees on wages and conditions through collective bargaining [...] and where the parties tries to take a broader social responsibility, preferably with minimal intervention by the state. It is around this heritage that our institutions in the labor market has emerged." (Söderqvist 2016b, p. 64; author translation)

The part-model discourse has since then evolved into a *myth* of how moments as '*state*', '*workers*' and '*employers*' relates to one another when it comes to the understanding of '*labor*' and where '*unions*' and '*employer organizations*' – on behalf of '*workers*' and '*employers*' – negotiate and stipulate through '*collective agreements*' which types of '*conditions*' and '*wages*' that is proper when it comes to buying and selling '*labor*'. In my analysis, the moment '*collective agreement*' is to be perceived as a hub within the discourse, since this sign connects and gives meaning to other important moments (Söderqvist 2016b). In Laclau and Mouffe (2001) terms such a master signifier is called a nodal point.

The hiring forms of '*full time employee*' and '*self-employed*' has been fixed within the discourse. The notion of '*full time employee*' – also recognized as the by far dominant hiring form – has given rise to the creation of various institutions in the labor market. These institutions has in turn evolved in accordance to the economic development and the change of society. The myth further stipulates that there is a clear scheme regarding responsibilities, privileges and obligations between the different actors. Furthermore, a set of labor market regulations has been introduced in order to make it possible for the workforce to, for instance: find a new job during unemployment, secure income during illness, take care of children (parental leave, care for sick children etc.) (Söderqvist 2016b). In contrast, the moment '*self-employed*' is not included in this web of regulations and orders that has emerged within the discourse – at least not to the same extent –

which is illustrated in the following:

" If we look at how social institutions are designed for the self-employed, it is hardly controversial to say that these groups do not have the same good access to, for instance, the system of social security or other benefits that employees do. [...] In addition, the self-employed lack some vested rights and conditions such as guaranteed holidays and working time regulations, and is not covered by the collective agreement umbrellas for pensions and other benefits." (Söderqvist 2016b, p. 44; author translation)

Dislocation

The notion of '*digitalization*' is introduced into the discourse as a vigorous transformational force which is "expected to affect the business community, the public, our privacy, and not least the labor market" (Söderqvist 2016a; author translation). It becomes obvious that this force is not perceived as an ordinary wave of change – that it is of a much grander dignity and is therefore articulated accordingly:

"Digitalization has become an all-encompassing term that describes an ongoing, tumultuous, digitally-driven structural change whose scope is guessed to correspond to the first and second industrial revolution."(Söderqvist 2016b, p. 4; author translation)

Here, the word '*guessed*' signals that the discursive struggle in how to understand and fix the notion of '*digitalization*'. But the realization that it will lead to a comprehensive and radical structural change is clearly signaled when it is compared to the historically significant changes that followed in the wake of the first and second industrial revolution. This comparison also ties the assumed effects of '*digitalization*' to the turmoils and uncertainties that affected the '*workers*' those days, and the important role that the '*union*' came to play.

Although not averse to '*digitalization*' per se, Söderqvist (2016b) sees that the ongoing technological (r)evolution brings with it new possibilities for organizing labor (both on the employee as the employers side) that in turn can cause problems to established ways of handling things. Since the part-model discourse (as we saw in the previous section) is believed to be built around the traditional roles of '*employer*' and '*employee*', it can be vulnerable to new opportunities and types of employment that '*digitalization*' brings. One of the concrete revelations of this is the '*digital platform*' since "the platform can be viewed as a technological invention that enables organizational innovation which briefly means that the traditional role of the employer, to manage and distribute work, completely or partially is replaced by an algorithm" (Söderqvist 2016a; author translation). Hereby, the '*digital platform*' introduces uncertainty into the part-model discourse and

through it threatens to dislocate already sedimented structures.

Nabers (2015) points the fact that dislocated structures generates a need for subjects to reconstruct and fill the void created by the dislocation. This entails change, since change "rests in the incompleteness of social structures." (Nabers 2015, p. 151).

The primary dislocating factor of the '*digital platform*' can be attributed to its ability to transform and change the way how work is organized and performed since the '*platform*' takes on the role as an intermediary, and thereby shakes the established relationships between firmly rooted institutions within the discourse. Amongst other things "a digital platform does not guarantee an individual's well-being in the same way that a 'traditional' employer does [...]" (Felländer, Ingram & Teigland 2015, p. 39). And also "freelancers such as Uber's drivers are not legally employees, they do not have the right to organize to obtain the collective bargain privileges and protections that most labour unions have" (Felländer, Ingram & Teigland 2015, p. 40). This implies that already fixed moments – such as '*employer*', '*employee*', '*union*', '*employer organization*' and '*collective agreement*' – partly loses their meaning in relation to the element of '*digital platform*' and therefore needs to be rearticulated in order to stabilize the discourse (illustrated in Figure 2).

In a sense, the dislocation can be materialized as a question which the discourse needs to deal with: How to reshape the identity of the part-model so that the '*digital platform*' can be included as an actor? And from a union perspective, the challenge can be formulated even more distinctly:

"[T]he question is what role trade unions and collective agreements may have in a future where more and more [people] are self-employed and works through digital platforms?" (Österberg 2017, p.25; author translation)

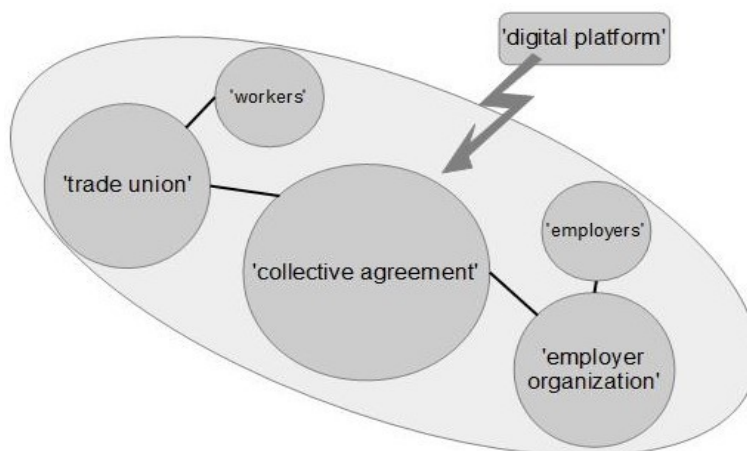


Figure 2: Digital platform as a dislocating factor

Antagonism

Since this analysis approaches the part-model discourse from a trade union perspective (Unionen) I will concentrate on the antagonisms related to this perspective. Let alone the identity problem that arises with the appearance of '*digital platform*', furthermore the union needs to tackle the fact that platforms already exists and influences the labor market. Let us start with the identity problem.

In Discourse Theory, identity is perceived as relations – that a subject becomes what it is because of, and depending on, its relationship to other subjects. Furthermore, that “[discourse theory] emphasize not only that the subject is split and fragmented, but that it has no basic essence, arising at it does through discourses via which it positions itself” (Dahlgren 2013, p. 208). And also, discourses is built upon the assumption that the moments which are fixed within a discourse is related to each other and excludes everything else. Antagonism, then, is a type of relation where "the presence of the 'Other' prevents me from being totally myself.[...] Insofar as there is antagonism, I cannot be a full presence for myself." (Laclau & Mouffe 2014, p. 111). Antagonism can therefore be seen as a discursive structuring that simultaneously blocks and constitutes identity and which "shows the split between the actual and the potential [...]" (Dyrberg 2004, p. 247). In this sense of lost identity, antagonism is not to be seen as a struggle *per se*, but more as a search for meaning where certain groups (in this case Unionen) tries to make sense of, and explore how to relate to, elements that has dislocated the discourse.

As we have previously seen, the union movement has its roots firmly anchored in Swedish history, a fact that becomes even more evident when the movement is seeking to position itself in relation to the '*digital platform*' (here, represented by the '*algorithm*') :

"Since the industrialization, the trade union's organization of labor force has revolved around the physical workplace. And its purpose has since the beginning been about managing the problems that arises when labor is bought or sold between unequal parts - against a strong employer the individual person is weak, but by joining forces a constructive dialogue can be reached. This truth applies not least when the physical employer is replaced by an algorithm." (Söderqvist 2016a; author translation)

In this passage, a chain of equivalence is formed around '*organization of labor force*' ('*physical workplace*' - '*joining forces*' - '*constructive dialogue*'): where the '*physical workplace*' stands for the tradition as well as the opposite of the fragmented and abstract that the new will bring; where the action of '*joining forces*' is signaled to be key in the bearing idea of the union movement – the power relationship has always been a central aspect of the part-model discourse and by '*joining forces*' the union movement has been able to even out the strength ratios and reach a common

ground where a '*constructive dialogue*' can take place; and where the '*constructive dialogue*' in a sense can be seen as a metaphor for a functioning part-model discourse as such. This chain of equivalence is building an antagonistic front against the 'Other' = '*algorithm*'.

But, as mentioned earlier, this antagonism is not to be seen as a struggle where Unionen seeks to circumvent and/or exclude the '*digital platform*' as an actor on the labor market, rather this is a sign of the of the sensemaking process regarding a new phenomenon. This is further emphasized by Martin Linder, president of Unionen, in the following passage:

"We will not resist innovations that make it easier to meet. But the development is moving fast and we want to raise awareness about these issues and broaden the debate. Many are way too late in the beginning and do not see the impact of digitalization on the labor market. It's important to realize that it moves fast when the platforms establishes." (Österberg 2017, p. 26; author translation).

The attitude of Unionen is clearly to follow the development and be evolve with it ('*not resist innovation*'), but at the same time realize that one can not perform the needed change on its own ('*raise awareness*'), and that the discourse consists of several actors who must jointly take responsibility and adapt to the new order of things ('*broaden the debate*'). Before it is too late ('*late in the beginning*' and '*do not see the impact*').

The above passage can also serve as a bridge between the two challenges that this analysis is focusing on in that it partly describes the identity problem, but also that it points to the the speed of establishing platforms and that it, within this speed, lies another and maybe more acute problem. Namely, that of competitive advantages and how to deal with a phenomenon that sneaks into a market where it sometimes can avoid regulation and thereby win unfair advantages. That the platform on the one hand – and correctly so, depending on its constitution as an intermediary – is gaining benefits by simplifying the process of buying and selling services, but on the other hand that it is "common that competitive advantages comes from avoiding or ignoring the responsibilities and regulations that their [the digital platforms] competing and traditional actors need to relate to" (Söderqvist 2016a). This shows that Unionen realizes that it has own work to do when it comes to identifying with, and relating to, the '*digital platform*'. But at the same time, that Unionen needs help with regulation and control, so that the '*digital platform*' plays by the same rules as the already established actors. Otherwise, the risk is that "the result may be anything from loss of tax revenues to wages and conditions dumping spirals that risks widening already harmful cleavages in society" (Söderqvist 2016b, p. 6; author translation). It is as the discourse has arrived at a similar road cross that the labor market parties were located at almost a century ago. One road that leads to legislation, and another that leads to the incorporation of '*digital platform*' as an equal partner and actor. It is

not difficult to imagine that Unionen is opting for the latter and by that giving different platform solutions "an easy way into the social contract through the Swedish part-model solution-oriented self-regulatory negotiating tradition" (Söderqvist 2016b, p. 6; author translation). But at the same time, the realization that this will never be easy since "[t]he institutions of society are, today, ill-adapted to such a labor market, and many unanswered issues exist ranging from social insurance, labor law, tax law, competition law and consumer law" (Söderqvist 2016b, p. 5-6; author translation).

5.2 The Public Service discourse

"Technology is constantly changing and our habits and our society interacts with the development. That's how it has always been, but the challenge does not diminish. Convergence and divergence places new demands on legislators and decision makers. How should the regulation look like, who should be able to do what and with what technology, and how will it all be financed? What is actually radio and TV in the information society?" (Public service-utredningen 2008, p. 61; author translation)"

Sedimented Discourse

The earliest formation of the Public Service discourse can be traced back to the first half of the twentieth century when AB Radiotjänst, in 1925, got exclusive rights to radio broadcasting. The first radio broadcast in Sweden were held in 1921 and handled by the Swedish Telegraph Agency (Kungliga Telegrafverket) who were the governmental authority with the responsibility for radio technology. The technical solutions at the time allowed only for a limited range of channels to transmit in the terrestrial network which led to that permissions were required in order to broadcast radio (Kommitte'n om radio och TV i allmänhetens tjänst 2005; Weibull 2013). One key role of the Swedish Telegraph Agency was to handle all applications for radio concessions and in 1922 sixteen applications were received. But since the Telegraph Agency wanted control of the distribution technology themselves, and when at the same time the administration didn't like a possible development towards the American model, where a more or less free radio market with almost no governmental control were developing, the Telegraph Agency turned all applications down. Instead a proposal were put forward that suggested that only one company could be granted the radio concession. Furthermore, that

"[...] this company should consist of representatives from the radio industry, having the technical knowledge, and from the press, represented by the news agency TT,

safeguarding unbiased programming. Further, the radio economy should be based on licensing radio sets and not on advertising." (Weibull 2013, p. 35)

The struggle for the radio concession came to be fought between two consortia where one consisted of the radio industry and other business interests, and the other of the Swedish press (with TT as the front figure). The press consortia formed the company AB Radiotjänst and the main argument for their interest in the development of radio as a medium was that it could turn to be a dangerous competitor, "especially if carrying advertising [...]" (Weibull 2013, p. 36). In the fall of 1924, a negotiation process between the two consortia and the Telegraph Agency was launched and resulted in the merger of the two where "[...] the radio industry and business interests should be a part of the TT application and be offered one third of the shares in AB Radiotjänst" (Weibull 2013, p. 36).

The '*radio*' came to be considered a '*public service*' and were therefore supposed to act '*for the good of the people*' and '*independently*' in relation to the state and other actors of power (Public service-kommitte'n 2012). Nevertheless, the state "would carry out a controlling activity and ultimately guarantee the economic base, by the radio being financed through license fees." (Kommitte'n om radio och TV i allmänhetens tjänst 2005, p.50; author translation).

As were the case with the introduction of the radio, the Telegraph Agency came to be an important actor in the roll-out of television, as responsible for transmission technology. One of the hot topics that featured the investigation of who would establish television as a medium in Sweden was that the Telegraph Agency did not want to expand AB Radiotjänsts role since they thought it could threaten its own existing monopoly of radio technology. Another great obstacle to overcome in order to introduce television was how to finance the new technology. Two separate, almost antagonistically, currents emerged where one favored advertising as a financial source, and the other was strictly against such an approach. By this time the Association of Swedish Newspaper (TU) formed its own television committee, since the main fear of the press "was that television should carry advertising and therefore be a serious threat to the newspaper industry." (Weibull 2013, p. 43).

The struggle on how to finance the new technology lingered on for quite some time and in order to reach success AB Radiotjänst and the Association of Swedish Newspaper Employers began to actively lobbying among politicians for a non-advertising model. "And in 1954 Radiotjänst was granted a concession for experimental transmissions in co-operation with the Royal School of Technology [KTH]" (Weibull 2013, p. 44). Finally, in late 1954, it was declared that the radio monopoly of Radiotjänst would be transformed into a combined television and radio monopoly. It was also proposed "that advertising should not be permitted since it could harm the integrity of television, especially in a monopoly situation" (Weibull 2013, p. 44). Along with the proclamation of how to organize television, the government decided upon a broader ownership of AB Radiotjänst.

The shares of the newspapers were reduced to 40% and the industries shares to 20%, whilst offering 40% to other organization (such as trade unions, churches, educational associations). At the same time, the name of the company was changed from Radiotjänst to Sveriges Radio (Weibull 2013).

In 1978 an organizational change was carried out where Riksradiion, Lokalradiion, Utbildningsradiion and Sveriges Television became four different parts with Sveriges Radio as the overall parent group. This organizational structure lasted until 1993, when the previous owners (Sveriges Radio) pronounced that they did not want to remain as owners for the Public Service function. This led to further changes to the organizational structure. First, it was declared that the separate parts should form three individual companies – where Lokalradiion and Riksradiion merged into one radio company – Sveriges Radio AB (SR), Sveriges Television AB (SVT) and Sveriges Utbildningsradiion AB (UR). And second, that these three companies were to be owned by three separate state foundations. These foundations were, in 1997, merged into one (Public service-utredningen 2008).

The traditional, contractual form, between the state and the Public Service companies was, in 1996, replaced by a broadcasting license which is announced by the government. In these licenses the different assignments to the respective Public Service companies are stipulated, such as: Overall framework regarding content in broadcasts, conditions for sponsorship, security and contingency issues, general provisions etcetera. These licenses are periodically processed and the current SVT period runs between 1 January 2014 and 31 December 2019. In addition to this, there are annual funding terms which mainly deals with the financial conditions for the year, but also the terms of the business itself (MRTV 2015; Kommitte'n om radio och TV i allmänhetens tjänst 2005). And it is to this broadcast license with recurrent funding terms we now turn when entering the dislocation section.

Dislocation

At the beginning of this millennium, the Public Service discourse came to acknowledge and be affected by the phenomenon of '*convergence*'. In 1999, the final report from the convergence investigation (SOU 1999:55) were presented and although it acknowledge the existence of different definitions of convergence – depending on the extent and/or complexity – it nevertheless defined the basic premises as consisted of "the conditions that technological development implies for the [fusion] of infrastructures, services and appliances" (Konvergensutredningen 1999, p. 13).

Due to the significant influence of '*convergence*' onto the discourse, the government came to re-articulate their earlier view of how Public Service businesses should be defined. Previously, it had been considered relatively unproblematic to talk about the activities performed by broadcasters,

the difference between '*program activities*' and possible '*side activities*' were relatively clear. But suddenly, "the new technological development, especially the so-called convergence, has given the broadcasters the opportunity to work in new areas, for example on the Internet" (Kulturdepartementet 2001, p. 66).

Already here one can imagine a slight dislocation of the discourse. In its wake, digitalization brought forward an area where the Public Service companies were able to broaden their activities and experiment with new technology, but more as a complement to existing undertakings. A complement which were not supposed to endanger the actual business – to deliver television to the public. At that time, with the facts available back then, it seems like a sound judgment to make. When one do not know the path of development, it appear natural to promote curiosity on the one hand and explore the possibilities of what new technologies can bring along, while ensuring that this experimentation does not jeopardize the actual mission on the other. Therefore the government decided to clarify which conditions that would apply when the broadcasters intended to engage in other media activities than broadcasting. The business were divided into '*core business*' and '*complementary activities*', along with the already existing category of '*side activities*'. (To put things in perspective, this categorization was conducted three years before Facebook was founded and six years before the introduction of the iPhone.)

"The government also wishes to emphasize that it is public service broadcasting which is the *core business* of public service companies. In addition to the production and broadcasting of radio and television, broadcasters can perform *complementary activities*. For example, use of other media to complement and strengthen core business. An example is the internet which has become an increasingly important form of communication" (Kulturdepartementet 2001, p. 66).

Then, the moment of '*complementary activities*' was articulated into the discourse as an answer to the uncertainty that '*digitalization*', especially through '*convergence*', brought about. And in this sense, the moment '*complementary activities*' never really came to manifest anything in itself. Rather, the moment came to act as a symbol for what was *not* part of the '*core business*', and thereby became some sort of discursive construction which would handle the uncertainty inherent in the development of a technology. An uncertainty that came to grow over time and thereby dislocating the discourse further, as we soon shall see.

But before we continue the analysis of how convergence has increasingly contributed to dislocating the Public Service discourse, we need to turn to the daily press (and in this analysis, I concentrate mainly on Aftonbladet) and study how their activities have been influenced by the

advent of the digital scene. It is no secret that digitalization has brought both opportunities to engage in new types of business and the possibility to interact with audiences in a whole new way, but at the same time it has also caused a major headache for many, since the previous established financial model is not that obvious anymore. "The paper magazine's old business logic is simple. The reader pays for the newspaper at the store. The advertiser pays to reach the reader. [...] Digitalization makes this harder" (Ringman 2017a; author translation). Because of this, many media have had to work with, and try to develop new, business models. It ranges everything from trying to establish payment services for in-depth journalism to new ad formats on websites and in mobile phones. "But the big gold lies in the knowledge of our readers. Again, 'Big data' = all information a reader leaves online. With the knowledge of our readers, ads can be properly managed, and reporting adapted to readers' interests." (Ringman 2017a; author translation). The focus of the digital business is generally about traffic flows towards the own platform, but especially about specific user data streams that in turn can generate capital in the form of customized user experiences and targeted advertising. For traditional media to relate to this radical change of revenue streams is problematic, to say the least.

"This development has created new business opportunities as well as new competitive conditions and, not least, shifts of power. Where the most significant one is that the traditional media companies have lost most of the old advertising business as well as lost the grip of the distribution, to a few digital giants who have a huge head start when it comes to data." (Medieutredningen 2016a, p. 201; author translation)

During the course of the Public Service discourse, the press has played an important role in influencing the development of structures regarding how Public Service is to be financed. As previously mentioned the discourse has, during two phases, been confronted with the introduction of new technology and on both occasions the press has actively been involved in working for an ad-free financing model. Although Weibull (2013) points out that during the introduction of radio the activity from the press was more cautious than during the introduction of television, when the daily press was much more active in lobbying for an ad-free financial model. He concludes that the reason for this may be that the radio was regarded as a technology while television was considered content - and thus a more real threat to the press's own product (Weibull 2013).

Against this background, we return to the concept of '*convergence*' and investigate how this phenomenon – from the point in time when '*complementary services*' was articulated into the discourse – has affected Public Service and daily press to the extent that they now can be said to operate in the same distribution channel and thereby *compete* with each other on a more concrete

level than ever before.

"On the Internet, different types of media companies meet, that previously used different forms of distribution. Traditional newspaper publishers today use both sound and moving images in addition to the written word and still images, while broadcasters not only make their programs available on the internet but also complements the content with texts, pictures, etc." (Public service-kommitte'n 2012; p. 86; author translation)

"New forms of distribution have radically redrawn the media map compared to when the Swedish Public Service Monopoly was created. Today, all actors do the same things: newspapers make TV, radio and television companies write text, and journalism can be consumed through a wealth of technical aids. But the new conditions have also changed the roles between the actors" (Gustafsdotter & Olsson Olse'n 2017; author translation)

Antagonism

In this analysis I will focus on two aspects that '*convergence*' has brought about when it comes to the Public Service discourse. First, and as was the case with the part-model discourse, there arises a form of identity crisis when the Public Service companies tries to deal with the meaning of the moment '*complementary activities*'. Second, where '*complementary activities*' has emerged as a focal point (empty and floating signifier) of the debate on how Public Service should be conducted in an ever-evolving media landscape.

At the time when the category '*complementary activities*' was introduced and articulated into the Public Service discourse the prerequisites for the spread of digitalization were completely different from what we see today. For example, in 2000 approximately half of all Swedish households (51%) had access to the Internet compared to today's figure which is 93% (Davidsson & Findahl 2016). It is therefore not hard to imagine that, at the time, the insight into how the Internet would affect Public Service discourse over time (as well as a more comprehensive media discourse) was very limited, but the Public Service companies would still have a chance to experiment with the new technology since "the internet can add value to radio and television activities and enable interaction between the audience and Broadcasters." (Kulturdepartementet 2001, p. 66; author translation). If we to this add that the broadcasting license stipulated that SVT would ensure that at least 99.8 percent of the resident population could receive the broadcasts, the discursive construction of '*complementary activities*' appears as a relatively uncertain component in the system of meaning that constitutes the Public Service discourse. This category has since then, and in relation to the expanding digitalization, increasingly being criticized because it has not helped to stabilize the discourse, rather the opposite. Among other things, the Public service-kommitte'n (2012) considered that "the concepts of core business and complementary activities have lost their previous significance. [...] As other forms of distribution are also required for the programs that are broadcasted via the terrestrial network to reach the audience, the funds should also be used for this purpose." (Public service-kommitte'n 2012, p. 94; author translation). SVT itself expresses the difficulty of relating to the notion of '*complementary activities*' when they points out that "today,

there are more who have access to SVT's complementary services than to the core business, since they are essentially provided over the internet that has both higher technical availability and higher actual availability [compared to the terrestrial network]" (Ahlstrand et al. 2017).

It is obvious that the construction of the category '*complementary activities*' emanated from the conclusion that it was complementary in the strict literal sense; that there were too few who had access to the internet to include that kind of activity in the core business. But the technological development has meant that today's reality looks completely different. From the ability to reach people and deliver content, the internet has evolved from a partly spread to a widespread phenomenon. SVT recognizes the radical shift in the media landscape and reflects upon its own position within the same. "We are challenged in different ways by the global internet giants [digital platforms]. Nobody can honestly say where this development ends and we are looking for different ways." (Helin 2017). However, over time, the concept of '*complementary activities*' has evolved from not only describing technological activities that can not be considered as part of a core business, but also to constitute a discursive field (acting as an empty as well as a floating signifier) where different groups now struggle to try and tell what Public Service should be all about. Therefore, it is not only SVT themselves who has a problem how to interpret and relate to the notion of '*complementary services*' (identity problem). Due to the fact that private media companies – as well as SVT – uses the internet as a distribution channel and of lately has evolved into '*digital platforms*', these companies needs to make sense of SVT and relate to them as a competitor on the digital arena (antagonistic problem). This sensemaking process is not entirely self-evident and as we shall see, the different sides have distinct views of how the Public Service mission should look like.

"The tone is sometimes high and the demand for explanation and causal relationship is high. Publicists, on the one hand, want great freedom and little government interference, but on the other hand clear rules and rules for conducting commercially viable media activities in markets characterized by sound and fair competition" (MRTV 2015, p. 15; author translation).

In what follows, a number of articles that were published during the first half of 2017 will be presented and analysed. In these articles, the two camps expresses their thoughts on the matter.

(1) In a debate article in *Dagens Nyheter* (published 2017-02-08) Jeanette Gustafssdotter (VD, TU-medier i Sverige, *private media*) and Sofia Olsson Olse'n (editor in chief and VD, Aftonbladet, *private media*) expresses their thoughts about today's media landscape and the Public Services role, and especially SVT:s, within it. They note directly, in the first paragraph, that "the threats to Swedish media companies comes today from two different directions: From the global online giants

– and from Public Service" (Gustafsdotter & Olsson Olse'n 2017; author translation). This statement signals that the press recognize *'the global online giants'* as a threat. In that recognition, they and SVT have a common antagonist. But at the same time, the authors also perceives SVT as part of the problem. Gustafsdotter & Olsson Olse'n (2017) see that the threats mainly deals with two things: (1) that the revenue generated through advertisements disappears into the hands of major global actors; and (2) that the private media is now exposed to direct competition from the Public Service companies (as we previously discussed in conjunction with the *'convergence'* phenomenon). The authors develops their thoughts further down in the article where they explain that *'the global online giants'*, due to their increased popularity as news medium, "[p]oses a huge threat to the business and existence of media companies. Not least when it comes to the fight for the necessary advertisement money."(Gustafsdotter & Olsson Olse'n 2017; author translation). Although the authors see the *'the global online giants'* as the main problem in this equation, they mean that SVT contributes to the negative development by delivering content to these. The authors takes Facebook as an example and points out that one of this company's weak spots is to produce own content. "But now, SVT is contributing to filling that gap and thus making Facebook an even stronger competitor for the media industry's audience" (Gustafsdotter & Olsson Olse'n 2017; author translation). In addition, now that Public Service companies together with private media are in the same distribution channel, the authors experience Public Service companies, with their financial resources, as direct competitors.

"Today, we see how both SVT and SR use their resources to compete directly with the private media companies on what has become the new home ground of the newspapers - online platforms for text and image-based journalism, television and interactivity with the audience. SVT and SR are increasingly transformed from being well-known radio and television companies to general news distributors, whose offer is similar to newspaper companies' online offerings" (Gustafsdotter & Olsson Olse'n 2017; author translation)

Gustafsdotter & Olsson Olse'n (2017) then turns to the broadcasting license and the regulatory framework that surrounds it. They think that SVT is *'stretching the limits'* on how this license can be interpreted. The authors mean that the license explicitly refers to *'broadcasts of television programs'* on the terrestrial network which now also includes to broadcast television online. But that SVT, to an increasing extent, has "begun to work as newspaper editors and increasingly a becomes a supplier of text-based journalism online" (Gustafsdotter & Olsson Olse'n 2017; author translation).

(2) In a debate article in Svenska Dagbladet (published 2017-03-22) seven CEO:s of *private media* companies came together and expressed their thoughts regarding the future of Public Service. They

turn, as did Gustafssdotter & Olsson Olse'n 2017, to the competition that has arisen between Public Service and private media and, if not regulated, will lead to the risk of private media being *'outcompeted'* and that in the long run "a situation where publicly funded companies completely dominate the media landscape, in close interaction with the global giants. It would be a hard situation for the diversity of voices in Swedish journalism" (Bowallius et al. 2017; author translation) The authors further discuss the design of the broadcasting license and stresses the need of *'well-defined assignments'* with *'clear motives and boundaries'* and that "[a]ll activities must have a clear connection with the Public Service companies core business – that is, the companies broadcasting in FM networks and terrestrial networks" (Bowallius et al. 2017; author translation). The overall complexity and the prevailing confusion of the matter is accentuated when the author's points out that Public Service companies' activities on social platforms are problematic:

"It would be quite unreasonable to deny public service companies access to these platforms, but equally unreasonable is the order of the day where they can act completely unobtrusively in ways that favor international technology giants at the expense of Swedish media" (Bowallius et al. 2017; author translation).

(3) In an article in the SVT online-magazine *Vi på TV* (published 2017-02-16) SVT:s CEO Jan Helin presents his view on the future of Public Service in general and SVT:s in particular. He starts off by presenting his view on public service, where SVT's mission is to deliver accurate news reporting as well as create a variety of programs that engages, entertains, and enriches. However, "delivering these values to license payers today requires development because people change their habits as a result of revolutionary technological development" (Helin 2017). Furthermore, the author points out that the media industry will go through the same *'revolutionary transformation'* that many industries have done and will do. He sees that market forces driven by *'globalization'* and *'digitalization'* will "require the investment and creativity of those who want to own and develop the media of the future" (Helin 2017). Further down the article, the author puts forward the vital need for change to *'reinvent'* Public Service and by that capture a new generation of users. The author acknowledges that they may not succeed, but that the commitment must be "on digital platforms and that we have a chance because the core competency of SVT is the media form that grows most in consumption in young audiences - moving image" (Helin 2017). The author does not consider that SVT violates the license and that it is clear from the terms of funding that SVT's funds may be used for *'complementary activities'*, where *'complementary activities'* are activities aimed at supporting *'core business'* and improving the ability of the public to utilize it. As an example, Helin points out that news is a *'core business'* for SVT, where (online) text is considered to be a *'complementary activity'* aimed at support, develop and improve accessibility.

(Note: In the further analysis, I equate the concepts of '*the global online giants*' and '*global giants*', referred to in the articles above, with '*digital platforms*'.)

It is obvious that over time, the notion of '*convergence*' – and lately materialized as '*digital platforms*' – has had a severe impact on the Public Service discourse. The dislocation has led to that the moments '*core business*' and '*complementary activities*' has been questioned by both insiders (SVT) as well as outsiders (Aftonbladet). This continuous questioning of the concepts has led to the possibility of interpretation, and it is precisely this opportunity of interpretation that has drained the previous fixed moments '*core business*' and '*complementary activities*' of their clarity and meaning. They have to some extent lost their reliability and can thereby, from a Discourse Theory perspective, be regarded as both empty as well as floating signifiers. They are emptied of their meaning because of the dislocation – caused by the discourses problem to relate to the notion of '*convergence*' – and they have essentially lost their position as fixed moments within discourse. Thus, they are opening up for new interpretations and ideas as well as to dispute. At the same time, they are floating because of the fact that they are able to signify various things to the different groups (SVT and Aftonbladet). By forming chains of equivalence, the groups try to make sense of the concepts and tries to articulate them in relation to other concepts with the aim to stabilize discourse. Due to the dislocation, an antagonistic front has been formed and the two sides now try to assert their interpretation of the concepts (illustrated in Figure 3).

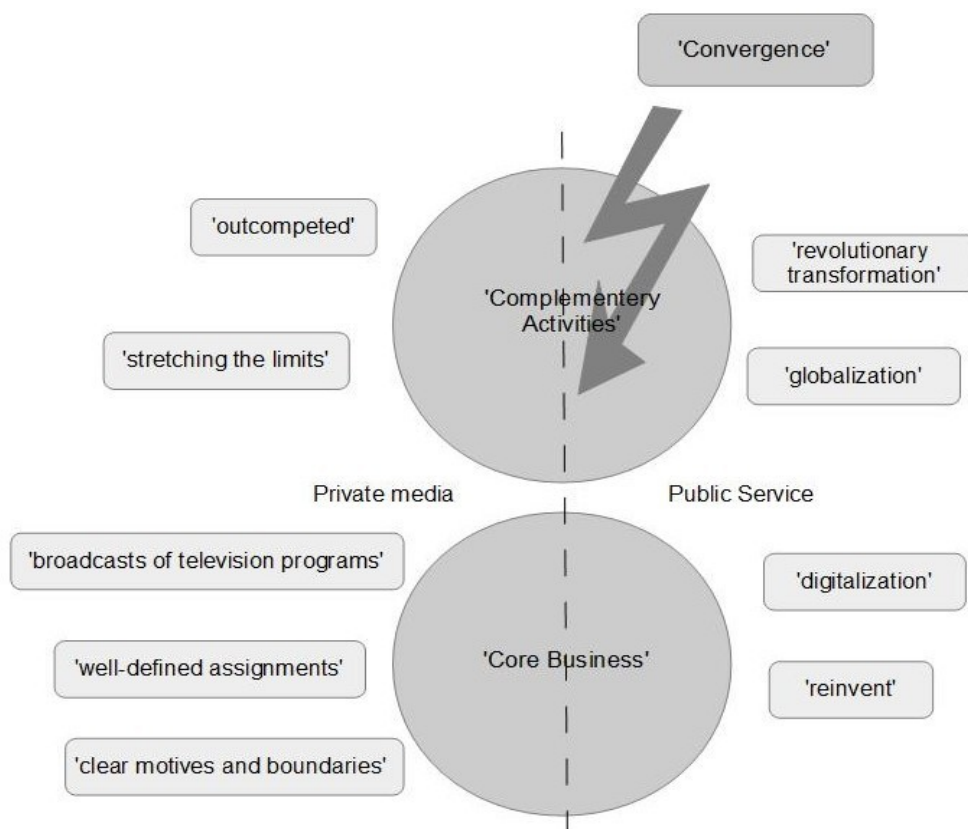


Figure 3: Antagonistic front built up due to the emergence of '*convergence*'

The private media builds their chain of equivalence around the idea that Public Service is *'stretching the limits'* in how to interpret the broadcasting license which leads to the need of regulation. Otherwise, today's situation threatens to lead to unfair competition and that private media is *'outcompeted'*. Further, that SVT's core business is *'broadcasts of television programs'*, and therefore the broadcast license needs to stipulate *'well defined assignments'* with *'clear motives and boundaries'*. SVT builds their chain of equivalence around the idea that the media sector is going through a *'revolutionary transformation'* and that they therefore need to change accordingly. That the forces behind this transformation is *'globalization'* and *'digitalization'* and that SVT, in order to stay relevant, must be able to cope with the ever changing surroundings. And in order to succeed, they have to be able to *'reinvent'* themselves.

“[I]dentity construction becomes possible when a discourse adopts an empty signifier that is able to unite a heterogenous number of signifiers/subject in a chain of equivalences and draw a line between a community and a discursively articulated antagonistic Other.” (Nabers 2015, p. 194)

6 Discussion

The emergence of digital platforms has brought forward a set of difficult questions for incumbent firms and institutions to answer in order to evolve and stay relevant in the digital realm. The business logics are almost the opposite of what the incumbent may be used to, where supply-side economies of scale has turned into demand-side economies of scale, and where the digital platform – unlike traditional business – do not aim to control value creation. Instead, they strive to build and create an open and participative infrastructure – where governance conditions stipulates what is possible or not – in which they themselves, together with others, can create and exchange value.

As the previous analysis shows, the digital platform may affect various areas in completely different ways. As regards the part-model discourse, the question has come to be about how to look at concepts such as '*workers*', '*employers*', and '*collective agreement*' in relation to '*digital platforms*', and what role Unionen as a trade union might play in this new, emerging labor landscape. As regards Public Service discourse, we saw how established actors, previously found in different distribution channels, has evolved (through digitilization and the subsequent convergence) into digital platforms. Furthermore, that this (r)evolution has hustled them together so that they now happen to act on the same digital arena (ecosystem) along with other local and global actors, and are hereby transformed from indirect to direct competitors.

Since the analyzed discourses can be said – based on the Nabers (2015) model – to be in the antagonistic phase at the moment, I intend to complete the fourth step (*Institutionalization*) within the discussion section since this endeavor is more of a speculation over how the different discourses may come to evolve over time, and how the different actors might try to make sense of the digital platform as a phenomenon, than anything else. I will start off by turning to the separate discourses, one at a time, and then sum it all up with a more comparative approach.

6.1 Part-model

In the report *Plattformsekonomin och svenska partsmodellen*, Fredrik Söderqvist (2016b) points out that a Swedish trade union strives to help and support its members in influencing their working conditions and wages, and that they have satisfactorily access to the jointly funded welfare system – and that this mission is best achieved through collective agreements, not through state regulation. He further points out that a large trade union like the Unionen, whose members are represented in almost all Swedish business, must relate to the broad public interest. Therefore, in a future platform economy, it is of the utmost importance that the labor force – whether represented by permanent employees or as freelancers – can influence and contribute to the development of the labor market.

"We believe that it is in the interests of society that this conversion takes place under orderly, socially acceptable forms." (Fredrik Söderqvist 2016b, p.98; author translation) The insight that this future of the platform can be said to be both light and dark appears as Unionen (Fredrik Söderqvist 2016b) recognizes the digital platform and the accompanying platform economy as, on the one hand, something extremely positive – where there are great gains in the form of a more efficient intermediation of work, etc. – but on the other hand, that eventual needed regulations needs to be effective, appropriate and easy to implement otherwise there is an imminent risk that: "the platform economy suffers or, more likely, it will emerge in an alternative state, outside society or the control of its institutions" (Fredrik Söderqvist 2016b, p.98; author translation).

In the above reasoning, the trade union's traditional role and mission within the discourse is presented as quite clear, while the way forward is pictured as complicated and cumbersome. The dislocation of the discourse, evoked by the digitalization in general and digital platforms in particular, has brought forward and acknowledged the tension between innovation and regulation as one of the biggest challenges for the parts to deal with. In the part-model discourse the main aspect of digitalization is the possibility of widespread communication which, in turn, has enabled for an intermediary model for organizing work to happen – where the digital platform takes on the role as the intermediary – and which further contributes to the expansion of the already existing intermediate concept to an unprecedented scale (Dölvik & Jesnes 2017).

Unionen (Söderqvist 2016b) suggests that, founded on a central collective agreement, a jointly-owned (between the two parts) institution should be created "whose purpose is to enable and facilitate sustainable transactions in the platform-based labor market" (Fredrik Söderqvist 2016b, p.101; author translation). By establishing a central regulatory and certification institution for digital platforms, a forum for negotiation for regulatory fulfillment will be created. In addition, such an institution could handle issues regarding payment of taxes and fees. Certifications issued by the institution would tell users that a specific platform complies with stipulated requirements and thereby serve as a form of consumer labeling. Unionen sees the articulation of a jointly-owned institution into the discourse as a way to stabilize and maintain the Swedish part-model. At the same time, Unionen acknowledges the rapid development of the platform economy and the inherent uncertainty that lives in this fact (Söderqvist 2016b).

But one of the things that the discourse needs to cope with in order to successfully incorporate the platform into the part-model is how to relate to the digitalizations force of short-circuiting national borders (Parker, van Alstyne & Choudray 2016). In the physical world national borders are quite tangible, but in the digital world they are abstract to say the least. Also, the digital technologies has had a significant impact by enhancing the possibility for business to carry out

activities remotely. And since distance forms less of a barrier, the possibility to reach and target customers is much greater than ever before (OECD 2014). This means that distance is not an obstacle in the traditional sense and the businesses can choose whether they will act locally or globally – and in a moment they can shift focus. It also means that digital platforms do not have to be physically present at each geographical location where their market exist – they can control business from anywhere. This may affect a variety of regulations, amongst them taxation:

"If a permanent establishment occurs, Sweden has taxation rights to income that is attributable to the permanent establishment. If, on the other hand, the services are provided or performed against the Swedish market without tax-related presence in the form of a Swedish company or through a permanent establishment, Sweden has no taxation rights and the turnover generated shall not be included in the Swedish tax base." (Skatteverket 2016, p. 35; author translation).

And as platform owners can shift focus, users can too. In the government investigation SOU 2017:24, *Ett arbetsliv i förändring* (A workplace in change) – which was tasked with investigating and mapping the challenges of modern working life – the investigation divided work performed through digital platforms into two main types: (1) Locally performed services where someone undertakes to perform a physical job for a customer; (2) Work performed digitally and without the geographical constraint associated with the previous type of work (Utredningen om arbetsmiljöregler för ett modernt arbetsliv 2017). This emergence of digital platforms, acting local and/or global, with domestic and/or foreign permanent establishment, is creating new challenges for regulators.

Given the traditions of the trade unions to derive from the physical workplace, new ways of thinking will be required to accommodate the demands that arises in the wake of digital platforms, as Söderqvist (2016b, p. 107) also points out. Apart from the more existential need of re-articulate concepts such as '*full time employee*', '*self-employed*', '*employer*', and '*collective agreement*' in relation to '*digital platform*' into discourse, the more tangible task of discussing possible necessary regulations, are some of the challenges that the part-models parties faces due to the emergence of the digital platform.

6.2 Public Service

Before taking on the problematic situation in how the different parties interpret the broadcasting license and what they consider should actually be included in the concepts of '*core business*' and '*complementary activities*', we should look at the fact that both actors have come to conduct

business on the same market and that they therefore can be affected by a competitive situation that none of them previously has been experienced. As the analysis showed it was due to the emergence of convergence into the discourse that set things in motion, and the evolution towards today's situation began. But it is possible that the discourse has missed to articulate and make sense of one fundamental aspect of digital innovation, namely generativity. To succeed in bringing this thought forward we return to the fact that two of the fundamental characteristics of digital technology are *reprogrammability* and *data homogenization*. And in turn, that these features significantly facilitate two of the main conditions for innovation to be stimulated – *convergence* and *generativity* (Yoo et al. 2010; Yoo et al. 2012; Kallinikos 2012; Kallinikos et al. 2013). Where convergence has led to that previously separated domains are now fused together – where the smallest common denominator is the digital bits that rushes through the network of cables and devices that the internet constitutes. Generativity, on the other hand, points to the fact that the technology is malleable to its nature and therefore in constant flux (see Kallinikos 2009; Zittrain 2006).

The '*convergence*' aspect has been articulated within the Public Service discourse and discussed on several occasions (Medieutredningen 2016a; Medieutredningen 2016b; Public service-utredningen 2008; Kommitte'n om radio och TV i allmänhetens tjänst 2005). Among other things, Medieutredningen (2016a) writes that:

"The situation is further complicated by the fact that the Internet is not just a new medium, apart from the traditional, but also a carrier of media. The digital transmission technology allows you to spread text, image, moving image and sound regardless of the limitations that exist, for example, in the terrestrial network." (Medieutredningen 2016a; author translation).

But the generativity aspect has not been discussed to the same extent, and here we may arrive at the discourse's real problem – to be able to recognize and relate to the dynamic nature of digital technology. Zittrain (2006), when defining generativity, points to a technology's adaptability which "refers to both the breadth of a technology's use without change and the readiness with which it might be modified to broaden its range of use" (Zittrain 2006, p. 1981). The incumbent might have a bit of a problem coping with generativity in the sense that they are used to technology being fixed and immutable, but now have to deal with technology that is dynamically changing (Yoo et al. 2012). The parties of the discourse, as we have seen, often return to discuss '*the global online giants*' or '*global giants*' and how they have turned the competitive landscape upside down. But the feeling is that this recognition of the '*digital platforms*' not really stem from an insight that some of the biggest platforms has evolved over time. That they did not just pop-up one day, but are fruits of a longer innovation and development process that not always is easy to predict the outcome of since

digital technology remains intentionally unfinished (Kallinikos 2012; 2013). This recognition of the generative aspect of digital technologies and the processes under which they evolves leads to questions like: Can one really control one's surroundings? And if not, how does one then relate to it?

As for the first question Parker, van Alstyne and Choudray (2016) believes that incumbent firms are used to the fact that competition develops over longer periods of time and that they therefore have evolved a metabolism that reflects this relatively slower pace of change. But in the world of digital platforms – characterized by networks that interact quickly and often in unpredictable ways – markets can change rapidly, as well as customer demands and expectations. Therefore, management systems needs to be changed accordingly (Parker, van Alstyne and Choudray 2016).

As for the second question, how to relate to an ever-changing world, one needs to tap into the thoughts and literature about ecosystems, and how to find their place in the same (Moore 1993; Iansiti & Levien 2004; Parker, van Alstyne & Choudray 2016). Leijon and Svenheden (2016) and Leijon, Svenheden and Svahn (2017) points out that in order for the incumbent to succeed in this new landscape, they need to develop four capabilities: to share resources without specifying the innovation outcome (stimulate value creation); to capture value from multiple value streams; to protect created value through interdependent relations; to create generative structures (ensuring ecosystem evolution) (Leijon & Svenheden 2016; Leijon, Svenheden & Svahn 2017).

In a sense convergence and generativity can be perceived as two sides of the same coin. On the one hand, Internet is a channel for distributing all kinds of digital information (sound, image, text) meaning that information is no longer bound to any specific distribution channel which has previously been the case (moving image → television; text → newspaper) – this complies with the convergence aspect. But also to recognize that the internet has evolved to also act as generative infrastructure (Parker, van Alstyne and Choudray 2016; Kallinikos 2012).

It can be said that the introduction of the concept '*complementary activities*' in the Public Service discourse was a way of handle new technology (Internet), which indirectly came to manage both convergence and generativity. In a way, the category became a bit of a sandbox where experimentation with new technology could be performed without affecting the '*core business*'. But over time the category has become increasingly problematic; convergence has led to that the Public Service companies now resides in the same distribution channel as the private media, and generativity has contributed to their emergence as digital platforms where they all, in principle, deliver similar content and are actors in a global ecosystem where they have to learn to relate to

each other as well as to all the other actors that can influence their businesses. And since many actors – local as well as global – now appear on the same market, and deliver similar content, there is a risk that a winner-take-all market develops. In the long run, it may end up with only a few actors which can handle their daily business really well. The winner-take-all market is characterized by, among other things, strong network effects and lack of niche specialization (Parker, van Alstyne & Choudray 2016; Kenney & Zysman 2016; Gawer 2014).

6.3 Digital Platforms

“To express this another way, it is not the case that we will experience a hundred years of progress in the twentyfirst century; rather we will witness on the order of twenty thousand years of progress (at today's rate of progress that is)” (Kurzweil 2004, p. 381-382)

Digital platforms dislocate, but in different ways. As we have seen, the emergence of digital platforms into the respective discourses has created confusion and uncertainty regarding how to make sense of this phenomenon. There are similarities: The identity problem arising from the *'digital platform'* draining meaning from already fixed moments within respectively discourse. But there are also differences: The public-service discourse has been influenced by both *'convergence'* and *'generativity'* whilst the most disruptive effect on the part-model discourse is due to the widespread communication aspect of the digital platform. This points to the fact that digital platforms can be perceived and appear as different greats. Furthermore, it indicates that there is probably no uniform picture of what a digital platform really is. According to Discourse Theory, the *'digital platform'* appears as an empty signifier, which, depending on a specific discourse, can be articulated and understood in different ways. I'll take one example.

As earlier mentioned Skatteverket (2016), on behalf of Finansdepartementet, analyzed how the tax revenues are affected by the sharing economy. This approach can be seen as analyzing one aspect of the digital platform – the appearance as an intermediary and by that facilitate and support the sharing economy. Skatteverket (2016) concludes that:

"there is no need for tax-specific rules in the sharing economy with the risk of distortion of competition, and that there already today is a difference in actual taxation between traditional economy and the divisional economy. In order to facilitate tax control and simplify things for taxpayers, Skatteverket [the Swedish Tax Agency] recommends that the government should investigate the possibility of introducing some form of reporting obligation for providers of platforms [...] (Skatteverket 2016, p. 5).

On the other hand, as we saw in the Public Service discourse, one of the private medias greatest headaches today is the loss of advertising revenue to the '*global online giants*'. In this universe, the digital platform is not perceived as an intermediary which provides services between parties, but a giant that erodes the essential advertising landscape. This aspect on digital platforms gives a whole different view on taxation and how conditions has come to change for those involved:

"When your product is a digital service, and your assets are mostly intellectual property, data code and algorithms, national borders become just lines on a map. Players such as Google and Facebook can move benefits between jurisdictions and in practice avoid taxation of their digital advertising revenue in many countries, including Nordics" (Nilsen & Wangen 2017, p. 2).

The '*crisis*' caused by the '*digital platform*' foresees '*changes*'. But how then can we explain and relate to crisis and change? And can Discourse Theory be of any help?

In his thought-provoking essay *The Law of Accelerating Returns*, Ray Kurzweil (2004) suggests that the human mind has difficulties to recognize and deal with exponential trends; that it is easier (but faulty) to intuitively comprehend and understand such a phenomena as a constantly linear progress, and by that neglect the disruptive force that comes with exponential growth. According to Kurzweil (2004), technology, and particularly technological change, advances exponentially. He therefore predicts that "the future will be far more surprising than most observers realize: few have truly internalized the fact that the rate of change itself is accelerating" (Kurzweil 2004, p. 381). From this reasoning follows: "[T]echnological trends are not noticed at small levels of technological power. Then, seemingly out of nowhere, a technology explodes into view" (Kurzweil 2004, p. 385). This phenomenon could be seen in public-service discourse where the emergence of the digital platform was perceived as radical shift, and not a fruit of a continuous (but accelerating) evolution.

Kurzweil's (2004) thinking of technology as an evolutionary process that grows exponentially over time goes in line with the thoughts on generativity (Zittrain's 2006, Yoo et al. 2010, Yoo et al. 2012) and the vision of technology as intentionally unfinished (Kallinikos 2012; Kallinikos et al. 2013). From these collective streams of thoughts, a view of the evolution of the digital appears as an ongoing and accelerating process – where the goal in itself seems to be a stream of innovations which in turn enables and contributes to drive the progression even faster. Given this scenario of change, I think that Discourse Theory can be of good help in trying to understand and explain the nature of crisis and change. Since the theory pays attention to both continuity and discontinuity – and thereby focus on the interplay between discursive path-shaping and discursive path-dependency (Torfinn 2005) – it is appropriate to use in analytical situations

where institutions and incumbents have taken-for-granted knowledge (products of discourse), such as established routines, ways of working, behaviors and attitudes towards phenomena in their surroundings (sedimented discourses), and one wants to try to understand how new factors may have shaken about their *reality* (dislocation). In a sense, dislocation can be "defined as those 'events' or 'crisis' that cannot be represented within an existing discursive order, as they function to disrupt and destabilize symbolic orders" (Howarth 2004, pp. 260-261). Ernesto Laclau meant that late- or post-modern societies are undergoing an accelerated tempo of dislocatory experiences – induced by processes like commodification, bureaucratization, and globalization – and that this accelerating rhythm of dislocations brings "[...] a greater role for political subjectivities, which emerges in the spaces of fractured structures, and whose decision reconstitute dislocated orders." (Howarth 2004, p. 261). A development which we have been able to follow during the evolution of the public-service discourse, where the incapability of really making sense of the moment '*complementary activities*', and the parties different interpretation of the broadcasting license, have produced an antagonistic front.

Digital platforms do dislocate. And they affect incumbents and institutions – as we have seen – in various ways. Evans and Gawer (2016) concludes in their report *The Rise of the Platform Enterprise – A Global Survey* that the emergence of platforms triggers reactions from governments at national as well as international level. On the one hand governments recognize the positive effects and platforms are perceived as vehicles for innovation, that they generate increased productivity, and that they facilitate preferable ways of asset utilization. But on the other hand, that digital platforms engender challenges when it comes to policy issues such as taxes, labor and competition. Further, Evans and Gawer (2016) points to widespread concerns over the dominance of a few US platforms and that these concerns are "likely to bring about increased regulatory scrutiny or even perhaps new regulations on digital platforms, and in the digital space in general" (Evans & Gawer 2016, p. 22).

7 Conclusions

This study set out to answer the question how incumbents as well as institutions are affected by the emergence of digital platforms. To answer this question two discursive analysis were conducted on two separate discourses – the Public Service discourse and the trade-model discourse. It clearly showed that digital platforms, in one way or the other, have had – or probably will have – an impact. But in different ways. As for the Public Service discourse we saw that established actors, previously found in different distribution channels, has evolved into digital platforms. This evolution has hustled them together so that they now happen to act on the same digital arena (ecosystem) along with other local and global actors with a whole new set of challenges to overcome in order to stay relevant. In the case of the part-model discourse, it was more about the different parties efforts to try to make sense of the digital platform as an intermediary that facilitates the sharing economy, and thus challenging established meanings around concepts such as *worker*, *employer* and *collective agreement*.

The analysis show that various stakeholders perceives digital platforms, and especially the effects derived from them, differently. It can therefore be difficult to accurately specify what a digital platform is in a general sense. Consequently, the comprehension of the digital platform can be said to be context-dependent. In other words, the digital platform appear as an empty and floating signifier.

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Appendix A: Discourse Theory – A Conceptual Overview

| | | Concept | Description |
|------------------|--|-----------------------------|---|
| Discourse Theory | | Articulation | The practice that establishes a relation between elements, building meaning. |
| | | Element | Signs that are not part of a discourse. |
| | | Moment | Signs that are fixed within discourse. |
| | | Nodal point | Privileged signs from which other signs obtain meaning. |
| | | Empty signifier | Signs that act as symbols of a missing fullness. |
| | | Floating signifier | Signs which different discourses struggle to invest with meaning |
| | | Antagonism | Struggle between discourses (the identity is no longer fixed, but disputed by forces from <i>outside</i>). |
| | | Hegemony | The process that dissolves the state of antagonism and establish a dominant discourse. |
| | | Logic of equivalence | Identities are grouped together to form a front towards a common <i>other</i> . |
| | | Logic of difference | Weakening the antagonistic polarity by breaking up existing chains of equivalence. |
| | | Sedimented discourse | Discourses that are firmly rooted. |
| | | Myth | A distorted representation of the <i>reality</i> which gives the false perception of closure. |
| | | Dislocation | A structural failure where discourse is unable to make sense of one or more signs. |

Appendix B: texts used in case studies

| | Article/Report | Source |
|--|---|---|
| Public Service Discourse | <i>Mediachefer: Sätt gränser för public service</i> (debate article, Svenska Dagbladet) | Bowallius et al. (2017) |
| | <i>SVT tänjer på reglerna och snedvrider konkurrensen</i> (debate article, Dagens Nyheter) | Gustafsdotter & Olsson Olse'n (2017) |
| | <i>Jättarna som hotar svenska medier</i> (Aftonbladet Inifrån) | Ringman, (2017) |
| | <i>En gränsöverskridande mediepolitik: För upplysning, engagemang och ansvar - Slutbetänkande av Medieutredningen</i> | Medieutredningen (2016a) |
| | <i>Människorna, medierna & marknaden: Medieutredningens forskningsantologi om en demokrati i förändring</i> | Medieutredningen (2016b) |
| | <i>Sveriges Televisions public service-redovisning 2016</i> | Ahlstrand et al. (2017) |
| | <i>SVT:s utmaning är att återuppfinna PS för en ny generation</i> (Vipåtv - SVT) | Helin (2017) |
| | <i>Kontinuitet och förändring (SOU 2008:64)</i> | Public service-utredningen (2008) |
| | <i>Radio och TV i allmänhetens tjänst: Riktlinjer för en ny tillståndperiod (SOU 2005:1)</i> | Kommitte'n om radio och TV i allmänhetens tjänst (2005) |
| | <i>New Media Between Technology and Content: The introduction of radio and television in Sweden</i> | Weibull (2013) |
| | <i>Utveckling och påverkan i allmänhetens tjänst</i> | MRTV (2015) |
| | <i>Konvergens och förändring: Samordning av lagstiftning för medie- och telesektorerna (SOU 1999:55)</i> | Konvergensutredningen (1999) |
| | <i>Radio och TV i allmänhetens tjänst 2002-2005 (Regeringens proposition 2000/01:94)</i> | Kulturdepartementet (2001) |
| <i>Nya villkor för public service (SOU 2012:59)</i> | Public service-kommitte'n (2012) | |
| <i>Svenskarna och Internet 2016: Undersökning om svenskarnas internetvanor</i> | Davidsson & Findahl (2016) | |

| | Article/Report | Source |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| Part-Model Discourse | <i>Unionen bakom resolutionen för socialt hållbar utveckling av plattformsekonomin (Unionen Opinion)</i> | Söderqvist (2016a) |
| | <i>Plattformsekonomin och den svenska partsmodellen</i> | Söderqvist (2016b) |
| | <i>Allt fler är egensanställda (Kollega)</i> | Österberg (2017) |
| | <i>Tillväxt och klassarbete - en studie av den svenska modellens uppkomst</i> | Johansson (1989) |
| | <i>Svensk modell i ny tid</i> | Johansson (2009) |
| | <i>Nordic labour markets and the sharing economy - Report from a pilot project</i> | Dølvik & Jesnes (2017) |
| | <i>Sharing Economy - Embracing change with caution</i> | Felländer, Ingram & Teigland (2015) |
| | <i>Svensk Politik</i> | Ohlsson (2014) |
| | <i>Addressing the Tax Challenges of the Digital Economy</i> | OECD (2014) |
| | <i>Ett arbetsliv i förändring - hur påverkas ansvaret för arbetsmiljön? (SOU 2017:24)</i> | Utredningen om arbetsmiljöregler för ett modernt arbetsliv (2017) |
| | <i>Delningsekonomi: Kartläggning och analys av delningsekonominns påverkan på skattesystemet</i> | Skatteverket (2016) |